

Albert Raymond Rideout

October 5, 1872—September 24, 1945

In Memoriam

During the years the California avocado industry was first gaining commercial importance—all during the 1920's—one of the men who did much to direct the attention of the public toward the avocado and its culture was Bert Rideout of Whittier. Perhaps no one has been more enthusiastic about the virtues of the avocado fruit, or more determined to enlarge its culture. Rideout attended a great many fairs and fruit shows making exhibits of avocados and gave away a prodigious amount of fruit as samples of the flesh, served on toothpicks, to anyone he could prevail upon to stop and listen to his eulogy on the virtues of this marvelous new fruit. As a result of thus acquiring their first taste of avocado properly softened, thousands of people became interested.

Rideout was born at Caldwell, Kansas. His father was a missionary on the Kansas frontier, having come from the State of Maine in the late 60's. His parents first moved to Oregon, but settled at Whittier, California, in 1895. Rideout was much interested in fruits and flowers and planted some of the first avocado trees in Whittier. He acquired and developed a tract known as "Rideout Heights," established an avocado nursery, and lived there eighteen years. He was a prolific experimenter in methods of propagation of the avocado. His tool kit contained a large collection of budding and grafting knives, rubber bands, asbestos shields, and even chewing gum for covering the grafts. He even used a potato peeler in some operations. He was the first to propagate and popularize the Lyon variety, and became so over-enthusiastic about it that he was often led to make extravagant claims for it.

When the Lyon proved difficult to establish in orchard form from budded nursery trees, the Variety Committee of this Society removed it from the list of recommended commercial varieties. Unfortunately Rideout took this as a personal affront. He resigned from the Society, of which he had been an active, devoted and generous member. He later published some very uncomplimentary remarks about the Committee. He then attempted to popularize the Lyon by sheer force of private advertising and publicity. Finally he became convinced of the fact that nursery budded Lyon trees developed too much dwarfing and too many failures. Concluding that the trouble was due to uncongeniality of small seedling Mexican root-stocks, he recommended the Guatemalan stock and proceeded to raise thousands of such stocks (mostly Lyon seedlings) and sold them widely. He promised to come later and teach the buyers how to bud these seedlings to Lyon. About this time he was weakened by ill health and was unable to attend to all this budding.

The Lyon avocado tree has a strikingly tall and slender habit of growth. Rideout recommended that the trees be planted very close together and predicted enormous yields and profits per acre. Subsequently it was discovered by others that the large percentage of failures of budded Lyon nursery trees was due not so much to uncongeniality between stock and scion, as to the shock of balling and transplanting budded trees. We now know that the Lyon grows well when top-worked on large vigorous trees, and there are at least two old and quite successful commercial plantings at Whittier. One has yielded as much as twenty tons per acre and both have been quite profitable.

Many of the Lyon seedlings Rideout scattered around the country were never budded. Many fruited in time with quite a high percentage of desirable fruits. From these we have the Hass, Edranol, Bonita, Pierce, Mundo, Marion, Shafer, Ambassador, and others.



A. R. Rideout

Precociousness of Lyon when grafted on bearing tree, as demonstrated by Rideout.

The Ryan variety was originated by Rideout at Rideout Heights and propagated and sold under the name "Summer Fuerte." This was long before Mr. Ryan purchased the property and changed the name to Ryan. Later it was recognized by the Variety Committee under the name "Ryan." Rideout also propagated and sold many original varieties including Camel, Weise Lyon, Banana Lyon, Dandelyon, to name only a few.

Bert Rideout was naturally a very kindly, loveable man, and generous to a fault. When visitors came he would load them up with samples of choice fruits and flowers. He was especially interested in gladiolus. The writer, over a number of years, spent many interested and happy hours with Rideout in his nursery and among his seedlings. The

exuberance of his enthusiasm knew no bounds and is responsible for his over-extending himself in support of the Lyon variety. It is very regrettable that Rideout's loyalty to this Society changed to bitterness after the disagreement with the Variety Committee over the Lyon. Subsequently he was greatly missed at the meetings and exhibits. During his later years he was in very poor health and could do little beyond caring for his gladiolus bed.

Rideout is survived by his widow, who as Myrtle W. Smith he married in April, 1903. She is a granddaughter of the late A. C. Hazzard, one of the pioneers of Whittier. There are five children: Miss Esther Rideout of Santa Ana; Mrs. Everett B. Cowan of San Diego; Mrs. Stanly Jacobs of Los Angeles; Mrs. Elizabeth Capehart of Riverside; and Albert R. Rideout Jr. of the U. S. Army. A brother, W. L. Rideout, who helped organize this Society in 1915 and served on the first Board of Directors, now lives at Yucaipa. A sister, Mrs. E. T. Stoddard lives at Whittier.

—J. Eliot Coit